Jesse James' Brother was Starter at 1901 Fairbury Fair Horse Races

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In 1901, thousands of Fairbury Fair patrons got to see Frank James, one of the most famous men of the Wild West of the 1880s. The Fairbury Fair hired Frank James to be the starter of all the horse races at the 1901 Fair.

The story of Frank James began with his birth in 1843 in Kearney, Missouri. He was named Alexander Franklin James. His parents were Baptist minister Reverend Robert Sallee James and his wife, Zerelda Cole. Frank's brother was Jesse James (1847-1882).

The father of Frank and Jesse died in 1851. Frank was eight years old, and Jesse was only four years old when their father died. Their mother married Benjamin Simms in 1852. After Benjamin died, their mother married a third time to Dr. Reuben Samuel in 1855 when Frank was 13 years old. As a child, James showed interest in his late father's sizable library, especially the works of William Shakespeare. Census records show that James attended school regularly, and he reportedly wanted to become a teacher.

The Civil War began in 1861 when James was eighteen years old. The James family was from the heavily Confederate western portion of Missouri. The secessionists in Missouri, including Governor Claiborne Fox Jackson, attempted to drive the Union army out of the state but were eventually defeated. On September 13, 1861, the Missouri State Guard, including private Frank James, besieged Lexington, Missouri. James fell ill and was left behind when the Confederate forces retreated. He surrendered to the Union troops, was paroled, and was allowed to return home. Frank was arrested by the local pro-Union militia on his arrival home and was forced to sign an oath of allegiance to the Union.

After the withdrawal of regular Confederate troops in the fall of 1861, a bitter guerrilla conflict soon began between bands of pro-Confederate irregulars (commonly known as bushwhackers) and the Union home guards. By early 1863, Frank, ignoring his parole and oath of allegiance, had joined the guerrilla band of Fernando Scott, a former saddler. He soon switched to the more active command led by William Clarke Quantrill.

Union militiamen searching for Fernando Scott raided the Samuel farm. They tortured Frank's stepfather, Dr. Reuben Samuel, to try to learn the location of Frank James and the guerrillas. Although they did not kill Dr. Samuel, they tortured him by hanging him. Shortly afterward, Frank took part with Quantrill's company in the August 21, 1863, Lawrence Massacre, where approximately 200 mostly unarmed civilians were killed.

Frank James was paroled on July 27, 1865, in Nelson County, Kentucky. There is a report that after his parole, Frank was involved in a gunfight in Brandenburg, Kentucky, with four soldiers that resulted in two soldiers killed, one wounded, and Frank wounded

in the hip. However, there is an alternative account that claims in the autumn of 1865, Frank, who was in Kentucky going to Missouri, was suspected of stealing horses in Ohio and that Frank shot two members of a posse and escaped.

During his years as a bandit with his brother Jesse James, Frank was involved in at least four robberies between 1868 and 1876. These four robberies resulted in the deaths of bank employees or citizens. The most famous incident was the disastrous raid of Northfield, Minnesota, on September 7, 1876, that ended with the death or capture of most of the gang.

Five months after the killing of his brother Jesse in 1882, Frank James boarded a train to Jefferson City, Missouri, where he had an appointment with the Governor in the state capitol. Placing his holster in Governor Crittenden's hands, Frank explained that he had been hunted for twenty-one years, had literally lived in the saddle, and had never known a day of perfect peace. Frank ended his statement with the Governor by saying that he had not let another man touch his gun since 1861. Frank surrendered to the Governor with the understanding that he would not be extradited to Northfield, Minnesota.

Frank James was tried for only two of the robberies and murders that he was involved with. The first trial was in Gallatin, Missouri, for the July 15, 1881 robbery of the Rock Island Line train at Winston, Missouri. In this robbery, the train engineer and a passenger were killed. Former Confederate General Joseph Orville Shelby testified on James' behalf in the Missouri trial. He was acquitted in this Missouri trial.

The second trial was for the 1881 robbery of a United States Army Corps of Engineers payroll at Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Frank James was also acquitted in this Alabama trial. Frank James never served time in a prison and was never convicted of any charges.

For the remainder of his life, Frank James held many different odd jobs. He was also heavily involved in horse racing. In 1901 the Fairbury Fair hired him to be the starter for the horse races. To increase attendance, the Fairbury Fair advertised in local newspapers that Frank James, the notorious reformed outlaw brother of Jesse James and accomplice of the Younger Brothers, would officiate as the starter in each horse race.

The 1901 Fairbury Fair set an attendance record of over 10,000 patrons. Shortly after the Fairbury Fair concluded, the Blade recounted the horse races were good and hotly contested. The Blade reported that Frank James, the horse race starter, proved to be a good man for that job. In that era, there was always a great deal of jockeying done and much time wasted. Mr. James laid the law down to the drivers, and they obeyed it. The consequences were that the races went off without an undue amount of friction.

In the final years of his life, Frank James returned to the James Farm, giving tours for 25 cents. He died at the James Farm at age 72 on February 18, 1915. He left behind his wife, Annie Ralston James, and one son. He is interred in Hill Park Cemetery, in the western portion of Independence, Missouri.

In 1901, thousands of Fairbury Fair patrons got to see one of the most famous men of the Wild West of the 1880s. Frank James did a great job as a starter of all the horse races at the Fairbury Fair.

Fairbury

FAIR

September 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 1901.

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BETTER AND FASTER RACES

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Do not miss the opportunity of seeing Frank James, the notorious reformed outlaw, brother of Jesse James and accomplice of the Younger brothers, who will officiate as starter in each race.

A. D. WESTERVELT, Secretary.

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